

3.
The Divine Appointment, and great Importance of the Christian Ministry considered,

I N A
S E R M O N,

Preached in *Broad-mead*, BRISTOL,

BEFORE THE

Bristol-Education-Society,

AUGUST 13, 1777.

By DANIEL TURNER, M. A.

Published at the Request of the SOCIETY.

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. MARK.

B R I S T O L:

Printed and sold by W. PINE, T. CADELL, M. WARD,
&c.—and by G. Keith, J. Buckland, E. and C. Dilly,
LONDON.

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of the Christian Ministry considered.

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By DANIEL WEBSTER, M. A.

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P R I N T E D :

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London.

S E R M O N, &c.

Amos ii. 11.

And I raised up of your sons for Prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye Children of Israel? saith the Lord.

IN order to bring the Children of Israel to a due sense of their guilt in departing from the living GOD, the prophet reminds them of the many instances of the divine regard they had been favoured with; amongst the rest, that the means of grace and true religion had been continued to them, from their first becoming his people to that day; through the medium, not only of a perpetual priesthood, but also of Prophets and Nazarites, who by doctrine and example held forth their duty and happiness to them. *I raised up of your sons for Prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites.* And for the truth of this, and to awaken their attention to the great importance of the favour, he appeals to their consciences in the clause following the text—*Is it not even so, O ye Children of Israel? saith the Lord.*

The *priesthood* amongst that people went by inheritance; not so the office of the *prophet*, or the religious service of the *Nazarite*; they were *raised up* by the special hand of God from time to time, as he saw it necessary. The *priests* read, and expounded the *ritual* law, the *prophets* chiefly the *moral*, calling the people to repentance, and enforcing their calls, by prophetic promises and threatenings. And we read of a *priest*, by the order of a *king*, going to consult a *prophet*, yea a *propheteſs*, on the great buſineſs of their duty.*

The *prophets* had their ſchools or colleges, to which the younger, who had received ſome general prophetic gifts, reſorted and lived together, under the care and tuition of ſome elder and more eſtabliſhed prophet, in order to improve their gifts by the proper exerciſes of devotion and ſtudy. Theſe young pupils were ſtiled the *ſons of the prophets*, on account of the inſtruction and patronage they thus received from their principals.† We have not the particulars of their hiſtory, yet from the reaſon and nature of things may juſtly conclude, that none were admitted into theſe academies or colleges, but ſuch as God had *raiſed up*; or who diſcovered ſome ſigns of the prophetic ſpirit; which, tho' ſo ſignal a gift of God, was ſo imparted as to leave room for further cultivation by proper inſtruction and application. A circumſtance, by the way, that affords a pretty full conſutation of their reaſonings who object to the utility of human means of improving the mind, preparatory to the work of the goſpel miniſtry.

The

* 2 Kings xxii. 12, 13.

† 2 Kings iv. 23. vi. 1. 2 Kings ii. 22.

The *Nazarites*, were persons separated by a special-vow of consecration, or devotion to the service of GOD; as you may see at large in the sixth chapter of the book of *Numbers*. They were bound by their vow to particular instances of self-denial, mortification, and holiness; and were ready to serve GOD, and the interest of religion, in any manner, or instance, he should appoint them; however, always by the purity of their doctrine, and the lustre of their example. Such were *Samuel*, *Sampson*, *John the Baptist*, and others.* The *Nazarite*, therefore, was a character of great estimation and honour amongst the people of GOD under the Old Testament, as appears from its application to *Joseph* by way of encomium.† And what the *Prophets* and *Nazarites* were, in general, under the old Testament dispensation, that the true and faithful ministers of the gospel are under the new; even the ministers of GOD, for the instruction of mankind in the great concerns of religion and righteousness, and the pointing out to their attention the consequences of their obedience on the one hand, and their disobedience on the other. And thus you see the words of our text may be very properly accommodated to the present times, and afford us some materials suitable to the design of this anniversary meeting. And here we may observe two things,

I. That the true and faithful ministers of religion are of GOD's raising up.

II. That his raising them up amongst any people is an inestimable blessing, and a token of his distinguishing love.

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* 1 Sam. i. 2-8, &c. Jud. xiii. 5. Luke i. 5.
xlix. 26. Deut. xxxiii. 16.

I. That

† Gen.

I. That the true and faithful ministers of religion are of GOD's *raising up*.

This was most certainly the case with respect to the *Prophets* and *Nazarites* in the old Testament church, as the text declares;—This was as evidently the case of the *Apostles* and first ministers of the word mentioned in the new Testament. The hand of GOD was distinguishingly seen in their calling, gifts, and abilities for the extraordinary business assigned them. And this, in the general, has been the case in all the ages of the church since, even to this day; and that as *really*, tho' not in so extraordinary and conspicuous a manner as then.—When our Lord says *Lo! I am with you always to the end of the world*, * he plainly intimates, that he would continue the ministry of the gospel to the end of time. And not merely be with the apostles to the end of the then present age. For, as *Dr. Whitby* on the place well observes, Christ says not *μεχρι των ημερων υμων*, as he would have done had he meant to the end of *their* days only but *μεχρι των αιωνων*, every day *μεχρι των αιωνων των αιωνων*, unto the end of the world. And so this evangelist uses the words elsewhere. † And the apostle assures us that GOD *sets in his church*, not only *prophets and apostles and evangelists*, which were necessary for extraordinary purposes in the first ages of the church; but also *pastors and teachers*, ‡ such as are always necessary. The apostle *Paul*, left *Titus* in *Crete* to *ordain elders in every City*, † which shews that a succession of ministers in the churches, for its government, instruction, and edification.

* Mat. xxviii. 20. † Mat. xxiv. 3. chap. xiii. 39. ‡ Ephes. iv. 11.
2 Cor. xii. 28. † Tit. 1. 5. 6. — 2 Tim. 1. 6. 7.

edification was intended. And indeed, nothing can be more evident, than that the state of human nature in general, and of the church in particular, requires such a measure, and that there is a suitability in it to answer the end; while the History of the Church shews that this has been the matter of fact; or that there always has been a succession of men, from the times of the apostles to this day, to *teach and to preach* the things concerning the kingdom of GOD; to pray in and with the church, and call men to repentance, faith and holiness. And what shews the *hand of GOD* in this matter the more conspicuously is, that this has been the case even in times of the severest trials, when the church laboured under the most dreadful persecutions from its enemies, and the ministry could not be undertaken but at the hazard of all that mankind hold most dear and valuable in this life.

And even at this day, the christian ministry, especially amongst Protestant Dissenters, is so poor and despicable a calling in the general estimation, and the faithful discharge of its duties attended with so many discouragements, and requires so much self-denial and mortification to the world, that scarcely any thing but a peculiar measure of the grace of GOD, and the over-ruling power of his hand can be rationally supposed to determine young men of any tolerable natural abilities, and with much fairer worldly prospects before them in the common walk of life, to give themselves up to it—and yet this is actually and notoriously the case.

Where, indeed, great worldly honours and emoluments are held out to view, and invite the young candi-

date, tho' but with the hope of enjoying them, no wonder there should be numbers prevailed on to take upon them the sacred character, as the necessary medium of that enjoyment: especially among those in the lower stations, and strained circumstances of life, and whose souls are mean enough to become the slaves of filthy Mammon. But where nothing of this kind is to be expected, but on the contrary many trials of affliction; the prospect of poverty and want, and consequently contempt; or at the most the hope of procuring the bare necessities of a decent life—and even this too often dependent on the capricious humours, and imbitter'd with the overbearing insolence of wealthy pride, and the heart-piercing thought of leaving, at the close of it, a beloved wife and children in the utmost distress.—Where this is the case, as it too commonly is amongst Protestant-Dissenters (tho' some few of us are more happy) what, but the special hand of God and his grace, could stir up and embolden the heart of a serious thoughtful youth of capacity for living in the world, to devote himself to the work of the ministry in our churches? In point of *worldly* interest, honour, and comfort, the lowest mechanic, of any tolerable ingenuity, is upon a far more eligible footing.

But here, perhaps, it will be objected. "That tho' there has been a succession of men bearing the character of ministers of the gospel in the church, even to this day, yet are there not numbers under that character, who appear to have been *raised up* by themselves, or by men like themselves, instigated by the lust of filthy lucre, or the vain applauses of the multitude, and some of them grossly ignorant of even the first principles of religion,
and

and as grossly scandalous in their practice? These men therefore, can never be said to be raised up by the wise and holy GOD. How, then, shall we know who are? I answer—Whomsoever GOD *raiseth* up to this important work, he most certainly qualifyeth for it, and in the course of his providence affords particular occasions and opportunities for those qualifications to appear. The judges of these qualifications, and the divine designation, must be such as have themselves felt the power of the gospel, and appear to live under its influence; particularly serious, solid, and judicious ministers, who are themselves held in general reputation.

It is true, the best and wisest of men may be imposed on and deceived in their judgment here; but this will be seldom, if they are sufficiently cautious and impartial. They will, therefore, expect to find, in every candidate for the gospel ministry—tolerably good natural mental abilities; a quick discernment and solid judgment in divine things; a lively relish and enlarged experience of the grace of GOD;—An understanding enlightened into the great leading truths of the gospel, and an heart strongly impress'd with them.—An ardent love to the word of GOD, and a disposition and capacity for the study of it.—A warm zeal for promoting the glory of GOD, the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the eternal welfare of mankind.—That he not only understands religion himself, but is *apt to teach*, or communicate what he knows, in an instructive and awakening manner to others; is capable of leading and animating their devotions by the gifts and grace and spirit of prayer, and likely to enforce the whole by the powerful persuasion of a truly pious, holy

holy and benevolent conversation; and should appear to engage in this work freely; and with all his heart, from truly religious principles and views. And even with these qualifications the candidate should be regularly called and solemnly set apart to the work, with proper testimonials of his abilities and appointments, according to the rules we find in the gospel. *For how shall they preach except they be sent?* * They cannot with any propriety send themselves, nor bear witness of themselves alone, as sent by GOD. This indeed, is too often done by the forward and self-conceited, who perhaps mean well, and by the artful and designing. Nor is a mission from those who have no proper power or right to give it, sufficient in this case—It should be, therefore, from some regular church or christian society, or regular ministry, or both. And when all these circumstances combine, there is sufficient evidence that the person in question is *raised up* of GOD to minister in holy things to his church: But without these qualifications (in some good degree at least) his most pompous and solemn investiture with the *form* of the sacred office by the hands of the greatest of men will be all nothing; while *with them*, whatever may be the mode of his call and investiture; whether that of diocesan episcopacy, scotch presbytery, or the more popular independency, he is certainly one raised up of GOD.

II. I have observed, that GOD's raising up a succession of faithful ministers in his church is an inestimable blessing, and a token of his distinguishing love. This is what the text plainly intimates and will abundantly appear if we consider;

1st. The

* Rom. x. 15.

1st. The nature and design of the gospel ministry in general; which is to conduct the public worship in the most orderly, decent, and edifying manner—To lead the hearts of the people to GOD, in prayer and thanksgiving, and publish the mind of GOD to them as it lies in his word—To preach the everlasting gospel, or declare the eternal counsels of *grace, mercy, and peace from GOD our father, and the Lord Jesus CHRIST* to sinful men—Shew them faithfully their guilt and pollution, warn them of their danger, and tell them what they must do to be saved.—To preach *the unsearchable riches of CHRIST*; The awful and delightful glories of his person, the design of his mediation, the perfection of his sacrifice and righteousness, the plenitude of his power, and the freeness of his grace. And from these great and interesting topics to *persuade men* to repent, believe and live—*Turn them from darkness unto light, from the power of Satan unto GOD, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified.* *

This is the main end of the gospel ministry; an end of the utmost consequence to the glory of GOD, the eternal welfare of mankind, and, under Providence, to the very being of religion in our world: and consequently a blessing of the greatest worth and excellency.—A blessing most wonderfully suited to the spiritual blindness, guilt, and pollution, and every way undone condition of sinful man; and therefore, peculiarly welcome to the hearts of all that see and feel their wretchedness; who all with one voice are ready to cry out, in the language of the prophet, *How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth*

* Act. xxv, 18.

bringeth glad tidings—That publisheth peace and salvation, and saith to Zion THY GOD REIGNETH. *

It will, perhaps, be objected here—"That we have the Bible in a language we all understand, and may there read and learn, the great *things of God*, and our *eternal peace*, our duty and our happiness; and consequently, that there is no occasion for the preachings of fallible men". In answer to this—It is allowed that the Bible is a most inestimable blessing; the rich treasury of all evangelical truth, the only external infallible guide to happiness. But we find by long experience that this is not *all* that is necessary to the ends proposed by infinite wisdom in that revelation. The generality of mankind pay very little regard to their Bibles, but give up their whole hearts to the business and pleasures of this world; and, therefore, stand in need of being continually reminded of the divine contents of that book; and to have their attention called to a more serious and practical regard to what they already know and believe.—The knowledge they have is very partial and superficial, and their hearts miserably unaffected by it. Their understandings, therefore, want to be further enlightened into the *meaning* of the scripture, and their hearts to be more strongly impressed with its infinite importance; Even the wisest and best of men have been always ready to acknowledge their need of the assistance this way derived, and have esteemed the enjoyment of it one of the greatest blessings of their lives.

The scriptures, therefore, do not supersede the use and necessity of the constant public ministry of the truths they

* Isa. lii. 7.

they contain: nor does it appear that infinite wisdom ever intended they should; but just the contrary.—The vast and comprehensive fulness of these truths, and the great variety of instructive and affecting lights in which they may be set; the ignorance, carelessness, and stupidity of mankind, and their proneness to neglect the great concerns of religion, demonstrate, with the most striking evidence, the great importance of the constant endeavours of wise and good men, to open and enforce the doctrines and laws of the gospel. And there is a natural fitness and tendency in representing such glorious and interesting truths, *viva voce*, or in verbal discourses, to awaken and impress the minds of the hearers; especially when deliver'd with seriousness and energy, by men whose hearts are strongly impress'd with them, and who are zealously concern'd to speak to the inward feelings, the understandings and consciences of their hearers. And when we consider that this is the appointment of God himself, and attended with the promise of his presence and blessing, it comes recommended to us as an affecting instance of his goodness and mercy, for which we can never be enough thankful.—And, indeed, there are very few of those who live in their sins, strangers to the renewing grace of God, that pay much regard to the sacred writings. Many of them never read them at all, and others do it only in a slight, cursory and inattentive manner, without any concern about feeling, or even understanding, what they read. If ever any of them have been brought to a serious and devout attention to their Bibles, it has generally been owing to what

what they have met with in the public institutions of religion, and particularly hearing the word preached,

It is not mere knowledge, even in religion, that will avail to our happiness. The main thing is how the moral feelings of the mind are affected. Men that know a great deal, often feel but little. To work upon these feelings, the constantly inculcating even well-known truths, and displaying their importance in a living ministry, is of the utmost consequence to the making such deep and lasting impressions on the hearts of men as are necessary to their eternal happiness.

adly. The importance of a constant gospel ministry will also appear, if we consider the happy effects actually produced by it. For instance (1) It has been, and still is, the usual means of the *conversion of the wicked*; of convincing them of sin and of righteousness; awakening their consciences, and persuading them to *for sake their evil thoughts and ways and turn unto the LORD*; or, in a word, the means in the hand of the divine Spirit of effecting that GREAT CHANGE which our LORD calls *being born again*, and without which we cannot see THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

At the first preaching of the gospel, after the appearance of CHRIST in our flesh, and his ascension into heaven, we find vast numbers of people before *dead in trespasses and sins*, quickened together with him. The Jews forsook their vain traditions, and false righteousness to embrace the doctrines of evangelical truth, and the righteousness finish'd upon the cross; the Gentiles turned from their dumb idols, and the words of man's wisdom to serve the living GOD, and embrace the word of his grace. Men
that

that were before immersed in the grossest impurities were renewed and sanctified—The heart once the vile nest of diabolical passions, became the *habitation of God through the spirit*; and this in opposition to all the combined powers of earth and hell. And, tho' not in the *same* degree yet, in *some* degree this has been the case ever since, even to this day; and the preaching of the gospel is still the grand instrument of *translating* men from the *kingdom and power of Satan into that of God*.

It is true, sometimes the reading of the Scripture, at other times particularly alarming providences, or a religious education have been the means of producing this great and important alteration in the hearts and lives of men. But where there is one instance of this effect by these means, there are numbers by that of the public ministry. Not indeed of the conversion of Jews and Heathens to Christianity, but, what in some respects is more, of the conversion of mere nominal and vicious professors of Christianity to its vital power and holiness.

Many a one, in our days, that has come into the house of God with the most inveterate prejudices against religion, has found that preaching which he was prepared to ridicule, the very means of removing those prejudices, chastizing that levity of spirit, and of pouring into his heart the love of God and of his CHRIST, and so of producing in him a new and divine life. Thus *faith still comes by hearing the word of God*.—There is scarcely a town, or even a village, where the gospel is faithfully dispensed, but can produce a number of witnesses to the truth of this observation. And I dare say,

* Rom. x. 17.

that many of you here present can testify—That the public ministry, has, either more immediately or more remotely, been the means of your conversion to God.

And it is notorious, that where the preaching of the divine word, has not had this more important effect of turning the sinner intirely from the evil of his ways; it has been the means of restraining him from running into that *excess of riot*, he would otherwise have done; and disposed him to the practice of many virtues to which else he would have been an intire stranger; and thus has been the means of preserving him from the many miseries attendant on a course of unrestrained wickedness; rendered him more comfortable in himself, and more useful to society.

(2.) The public institutions of religion, and particularly the preaching of the gospel, is also the principal means of supporting and improving the spiritual and divine life, where it is begun; or, as the apostle expresseth it, *of edifying the body of CHRIST.** By this means, especially, the weak and doubting believer has found his faith and hope strengthened; the cold and languid have been warmed and animated; the wavering confirmed, and the backslider reclaimed. The apostle, therefore, exhorts us, *as new-born babes to receive the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby.†* Receive it, that is, as GOD himself has appointed it to be administered. And, indeed, there never was an instance of a solid, lively Christian, amongst the neglectors of the public ministry. Nor is it possible there should, for they are out of that course of things, of causes and effects, which the divine wisdom and goodness have established.

3. And

* Ephes. iv. 22.

† 1 Pet. ii. 2.

(3) And as the *power*, so the *comforts* of the *spiritual life*, depend eminently upon the public preaching of the divine word. It is one part of the charge given to its ministers—*Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.*—And the faithful amongst them make it their business to do so.—To this end they speak much of CHRIST, as the *consolation of Israel*;—Display the all-sufficiency of his sacrifice; the preciousness of his promises, and his never-failing faithfulness to make them good. The tenderness of his compassions, and his readiness to succour those who are tempted.—And while these treasures of divine comfort are thus laid open—the afflicted Christian feels their heart-cheering power, and rejoices in it.

It is true, he has been taught to consider his Bible as the great fountain of consolation, and to exercise his faith and hope there for that purpose. But, there are seasons of sorrow, when even the Bible itself appears as a sealed book to him. He reads and prays, and considers, but finds not the comfort he wants. In this extremest distress, and with an heart overwhelm'd with grief and fear, and almost hopeless despondency, he has often gone into the House of GOD, and found the desirable blessing there. Something has been dropt in prayer, or preaching, or both, that has been carried with divine power to his heart: The dark cloud that hung over his soul has been scattered, his faith strengthened, his hope revived, and he has gone his way rejoicing, and testifying, that GOD is indeed to be seen in his *sanctuary*, and that they are *blessed who dwell in his house*. And here the poor and needy, and they who have no helper, often find their chief and most reviving consolations.

Tho' all the rest of the week bowed down with labor and sorrow, the day of the Lord returns, and gives them pleasing hopes—They wait on their GOD in his public worship, and his hand wipes away the tear of affliction from their eyes, and pours in the balm of his gracious love into their hearts. With peculiar propriety and emphasis, therefore, our Lord says, *The poor have the Gospel preach'd to them.** And here too the more happy encrease their joys—find their graces cherished—their affections spiritualized—hold delightful communion with their GOD—are indulged with reviving foretastes of the pleasures of the everlasting Sabbath, and are the more abundantly prepared for the full enjoyment of its business and blessedness in the heavenly world. Of such use and importance is the constant public ministration of the Gospel to the temporal and eternal interest of mankind. And it adds not a little to the pleasure of this great blessing, when they who bring us these glad tidings are *raised up amongst ourselves*; and are near and dear to us in the bonds of nature or of grace; and such as are in the younger years of life, and consequently likely to be long useful in this important service, to the Church and to the world. So the Text—and *raised up of YOUR SONS for Prophets*, and of *YOUR YOUNG men for Nazarites*. And 'tis mentioned as a distinguishing favour to the Jews, that the Messiah should be *raised up of their brethren*.†

(4.) The importance of the continuance of the Christian ministry amongst us, will farther appear if we consider the miserable condition of mankind where it is wanting. And

* Mat. xi. 5.

† Deut. xviii. 15. 19.

And here I need not lead you abroad into the countries overspread with heathenish darkness, or to the wretched people that sit, indeed, in the shadow of death, and remind you of their gross superstition, and idolatry, no; we have, even in this Christian and Protestant country, shocking and deplorable instances of the consequences of the want of a truly evangelical ministry. Look into the towns and villages where there is no gospel preached; what gross ignorance of religion, what vice and profaneness, and every kind of wickedness do you see? I say where the gospel is not preach'd; for there are, I fear, many places in this kingdom, with numbers of inhabitants, where there is no preaching at all, or very seldom: and many others, where, tho' there be something under that name, yet with little more of the gospel in it than we may find in the discourses of the heathen philosophers and moralists. A dialogue out of *Plato*, or a chapter out of *Tully's* offices, or *Seneca's* morals, would be every way as much to the purpose of promoting the spiritual and eternal interests of mankind, as many of the sermons of those who call themselves Christian ministers. They preach, but it is not CHRIST JESUS *the Lord*, nor any thing properly, and genuinely evangelical. And the consequence is, the people lose sight of the gospel, and the right way of salvation, the peculiar duties of Christianity, and the glorious prospects it opens to us in another world—They know little or nothing of the character of CHRIST, or the great end and design of his amazing humiliation and death, and therefore in the very face of the lifeless harangues they hear from such preachers, on
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the common thread-bare topics of mere morality, they become extremely immoral. Their heads may, perhaps, be somewhat informed in the knowledge of their more general duties; but, for want of the gospel motives, their hearts remain unaffected, and for want of its spirit, unrenewed. The great ends of the gospel ministry are to convince mankind of sin and of righteousness; to warn the impenitent of their danger, encourage the penitent with the promises of pardon and eternal life, and form their minds to the relish and enjoyment of its felicity. But these great ends can never be answered by preaching any thing but the pure and genuine gospel of CHRIST; by opening its gracious doctrines, and enforcing its duties from the consideration of the love of GOD therein manifested;—CHRIST crucified is the wisdom and the power of God to salvation, and therefore the life and soul of all true morality:—It is by his vital spirit our minds are form'd to just notions of it, and a true relish for it—It is by his love shed abroad in our hearts, that we are animated, indeed, to the practice of it—It is this that melts us down into true repentance, inspires us with real hungrings and thirstings after righteousness, supports us against temptation, and enables us to overcome this world, by opening to us the prospect of a better.—Without this *Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*, every system of morals, however beautiful in appearance, is but a mere lifeless statue, utterly incapable of communicating the least vital influence to the hearts of men. No wonder then, that where the *gospel is not preached*, spiritual darkness, impiety, and wickedness, should prevail,

vail, or the mere form of godliness without the power, as we see in fact they do.

These people have, or may have, the Bible in their houses, and hear suitable portions of it read in some of their places of worship; but for want of the great truths therein contained being particularly pointed out to them, and urged upon their attention, they pay little or no regard to them, and live, in reality, *without God in the world.* *

It is true, and should be acknowledged with sorrow, that even where the gospel is preached in its purity and power, there are many who constantly hear it, that pay little or no regard to it, and live as wickedly as mere Heathens, and in some respects more so. But, tho' this is the unhappy case of some, yet not of all—There are many others in the same place, that are the wiser and the better for the public ministry—Some, even of them who have long trifled with it, and abused it, have felt its saving power, and become eminent patterns of piety and virtue; and many others have been reclaimed from the more enormous vices. But look into the places where the gospel is not preached, and you will scarcely find one, in some hundreds, that has any serious sense of Religion, or the fear of *God*, and the love of the *LORD JESUS CHRIST*—Instead of this, they are grossly vicious and profane, and most miserably left in the darkness and corruption of the world that lies in wickedness.

Does not then this demonstrate, with the most abundant evidence, the vast, the infinite importance of a

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continued

* Ephes. ii. 12.

continued gospel ministry, and what an inestimable blessing it is? Certainly it does. And I may, without farther argument, appeal to every feeling heart amongst *you* who have any sense of religion, any regard for the honour of GOD, the kingdom of CHRIST, the interest of virtue, the happiness of your fellow-sinners, whether you don't *feel* the truth that I am inculcating, and that you are forced to acknowledge, that it is *even thus!*

IMPROVEMENT,

1st. Hence then we learn the great importance of exerting our utmost endeavours, in supporting and encouraging a truly evangelical ministry. We cannot here be well too zealous; and the miserable coldness and indifference to religion which so greatly prevails amongst us, calls aloud for our most vigorous efforts. GOD *can* indeed, accomplish his purposes without the exertion of human power and wisdom; but he is pleased, generally, to make use of them as instruments in his hand, and as such he calls upon us to use them. And for the good purpose of continuing such a ministry amongst us it is certainly of great importance, to look out for such, young persons especially, whose hearts it appears GOD has inclined to this great work, and to whom he has imparted the leading qualifications for it, and, as the case requires, support and encourage them in their preparatory studies. This is the professed design of the BRISTOL EDUCATION-SOCIETY. A design truly noble and important, and every way worthy of all the countenance we can possibly give it. And, blessed
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be GOD, we can argue in favour of it, not only from probable conjectures in *theory*, but also from *matter of fact*.—We have abundant proof, that it has hitherto, *actually* answer'd the end intended, *with remarkable success*. Several destitute churches have by this means been supplied with serious and useful preachers, which otherwise must, in all appearance, have mourn'd the want of them as sheep without a *shepherd*; and their profane neighbours have been left to wander on in the broad road to destruction, without one serious call to repentance, one serious invitation to look to the *only name given under Heaven for salvation*, but some of whom are now rejoicing in it, and others giving hope of their soon sharing in the same grace.

And certainly we have reason to conclude that what has been begun so apparently under the auspices of Divine Providence, will still be smiled upon by it, and that this little seminary of learning and piety will prove a growing nursery from whence many destitute churches in future shall be supplied, with *able ministers of the new Testament*.

It must, therefore, give unutterable pleasure to you, my dear and honoured friends, who are the encouragers of this excellent and important institution, to reflect upon the happy, happy consequences, of your truly Christian zeal and charity exerted in its support. The money *this* way expended, has certainly been *well* spent; and, if proceeding from the good principle I trust it does, will be so far from being lost that you will find
it

it at last a treasure laid up in heaven, with glorious interest, to your unspeakable and everlasting felicity.

I am sensible, that such of you as enjoy more than the necessaries of life, in your respective stations, have many calls upon your benevolence, which I earnestly wish you to regard, as I trust you do; but there are none, consider'd every way, so great and important as this. Here the spiritual food, and even the eternal life of precious souls, the glory of GOD, the joy of the Redeemer, are eminently concerned. What you do this way, extends its happy effects to the future and immortal world; and numbers amongst the redeemed will have reason to bless GOD for you, thro' the endless ages of eternity! I would, therefore, if I thought there was any occasion for it, urge you with many exhortations, to *continue*, and if possible, enlarge your bounty here. And do call upon all others, who are lovers of CHRIST and his gospel, whom this address may reach, to lend their helping hand, in the watering and cherishing this plant which, I trust, we may say the *right hand of the Lord hath planted*,* that the blessed fruit of it may be still more fair and abundant. This would be indeed *honouring the Lord with their substance*,† and certainly meet with a gracious reward. Ministers are dying men, and their respective churches in the appointed time, must in course be reduced to a state of spiritual widowhood.—A sad and melancholy state at best, and would be deplorable beyond description, were there not an hope of their being again supplied with faithful pastours. And where

* Psa]. lxxx. 15.

† Prov. iii. 9.

where more to the purpose of that important hope, can they look, under Providence, than to these schools of the Prophets? To this, under your patronage in particular, may they look without disappointment to the latest ages! And may this, and every other seminary of sound learning and piety, be favoured with the perpetual smiles of our God, and be the happy means of diffusing far and wide the pure spirit of genuine Christianity, liberty, and love!

2. We learn, from what has been said, the *greatness and difficulty* of the work of a gospel minister, and with what serious reverence, and humble trust in God it should be undertaken.

I trust, that you my dear young friends, who are supported by *this Society* with a view to your engaging in that work, have again and again devoutly consider'd the matter; and that you are so habitually sensible of your own insufficiency for it, as to lead you daily to the throne of grace, and with the utmost earnestness to plead there for grace to help you, that you may be found diligent and faithful. If you look forward you will see many trials and discouragements before you, and it will be no wonder if you should meet with even more than you foresee. But let not your hearts fail.—That good God that has inclined you to this work will never leave nor forsake those who humbly seek him and trust in him. He hath said, that as your day is your strength shall be. His gracious presence will render all supportable and easy to you beyond what you can now conceive, and even make you rejoice in your tribulation.

Cast

Cast all your fears at the foot of the cross of JESUS—Look up to his fulness; confide in his promises, lay hold on his strength; consider his trials and patience in instructing mankind. When afflicted for the want of success in your labours, remember it was once the case with him. And, therefore, if faithful, tho' you may complain with him in the pathetic language of the prophet—I *have labour'd in vain, and spent my strength for nought, and in vain*; yet you may also say with him—*My judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my GOD.* *

The more humble, self-denying, and mortified to the world you are, so much the better qualified for the gospel ministry, and so much the more comfortable you will find it, be so much the more ornamental to it, and useful in it. When discouragements press upon you, remember, the cause you are engaged in, is the cause of GOD and his CHRIST, who will never suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, and that whatever you lose in this world will be made up to you in the next. There is a REALITY in the promises of the gospel, which you will find in proportion to your trust in them to your delightful satisfaction.

But while you thus encourage yourselves in the Lord your GOD, let no pains or diligence be wanting for the improvement of your minds in useful knowledge. This is of greater consequence to you than you may apprehend. Human literature, tho' not *absolutely* necessary to the gospel minister, is exceedingly important, whatever

* Isa, xl, 4.

ever they may say to the contrary who know nothing of it, and are puffed up with the vain conceit of their own ignorant minds. It has most certainly a tendency to enlarge and invigorate the mental powers, and render them more capable of entering into any subject, and of illustrating it with greater propriety.—Had not the apostle *Paul* been a scholar, as well as divinely inspired, we should scarcely have had the great truths of the gospel set in so full and striking a light, as we find them to be in his writings. The other apostles were divinely inspired as well as he, and understood the gospel as well, in every thing essential; but they have none of them shewn that vast compass of thought, and grandeur of sentiment, or deliver'd themselves with that pathetic sublimity of style, and vigour of expression he hath done. The natural powers of genius are the gift of GOD: The improvement of them in rational science, is agreeable to his will, and effected by his blessing. And he is pleased to make use of these natural and improved powers of the human mind, for the carrying on his various designs in the world, and particularly in the great concern of religion; and even under the influence of supernatural inspiration, leaves them to operate according to that diversity and peculiarity his servants respectively possess, and that marks and distinguishes their particular mental characters.—Hence we see the copiousness and pathetic liveliness of *Paul*; the solid manliness of *Peter*; the plain, honest simplicity of *James*; and the tender benevolence and spirituality of *John*, very strikingly apparent through all the glory of their respectively inspired writings.

Let

Let me then beseech you, my dear young brethren, to make it your most serious care to improve your several different geniuses, and original casts of mind, in the best manner you can, and by all the means in your power. The work before you is great, important, awful; and awful the account you must give of your part in it. But the GOD that has raised you up amongst us for it, is able, and willing, *to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask, or think, according to the power that worketh in you.* Study the scriptures much; not only critically, but above all devotionally; and pray earnestly over your meditations, that you may feel their power, taste their sweetness, and drink into their vital spirit. This is the way to be most useful.

Lastly. If a gospel-ministry be so great and valuable a blessing, how thankful should we be for it! How careful to improve it to the glory of GOD and our own spiritual and eternal Interest! The people of this country have been long indulged in this special token of the divine favour. But what have their returns been? how cold their gratitude, how little their improvement! The heavenly manna has been pour'd around their tents, but their souls have loathed it as light bread.—They are too generally grown weary of hearing of *salvation by a crucified CHRIST.* The doctrines of the gospel are too humbling to their pride; and the precepts of the gospel too mortifying to the spirit of licentiousness they wish to indulge. They are hard sayings which they cannot bear. Blessed be GOD this is not universally the case. There are some that love the

the ministry of the divine word, and find in it continual refreshment and comfort, are thankful for it, and wish and endeavour to improve the mercy. Let this be our concern and study. Let us labour to affect our minds, impress them deeply with the infinite importance of the blessing, and improve it in the growing spirituality of our hearts, the holiness of our lives, and a zealous concern for its credit and support. Let the business of the world be regarded in its place; but let RELIGION be the supreme object of our attention—Not the little nostrums of a party about the *modes* of faith and worship, but the VITAL POWER OF GENUINE CHRISTIANITY, as it *lies in the Bible* unadulterated by the sophistry of men affecting to be wise above what is written, where she appears like herself, infinitely grand, awful, and delightful; most wonderfully adapted to inspire the hearts of men with the brightest hopes, and to purify and unite them in the LOVE OF GOD, the source and centre of all true felicity; whose is the kingdom, the power and glory now, and ever shall be world without end. AMEN!

F I N I S.

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